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**Anth 206**

**Ethnography& Ethnology**

**Real Men Shop**

**Introduction**

As a married woman with three grown sons, I have spent a lot of time shopping in the men’s department of clothing stores. I have accompanied my husband and sons while they shopped for clothing, and I have also shopped without them in the men’s department. I was curious if I would find any patterns as I observed other people shopping for clothing. I was also curious if other men bothered trying on clothes before they purchased them, and if they usually did their own shopping. Finally, I wanted to know if shopping for clothing was something men would prefer to delegate to someone else.

My study will focus on the observation and brief interview of people, particularly men, shopping for clothing in the men’s department. I was only able to observe and interview a small statistical sample of the local population for the purposes of this ethnography.

**Methodology**

Since this is a gender study, and not a socio-economic study, I chose to do field work in both a high-end and a lower priced store to see if a common pattern emerged for male shoppers that was not due to the cost of the clothing, or the perceived status of the store. I chose two stores that are in close proximity to my home, which is located in a medium sized city in the Pacific Northwest. Both stores are within one mile of each other, so potentially any of the people I observed could shop in either store if they chose to. The first store, which I will refer to as Wally-World, is a big-box store that offers everything from groceries, clothing, and house wares to services such as a pharmacy, nail and hair salon, and an optical center. The second store, which I will refer to as Tracy’s, is also a large box store that is part of a nation-wide chain. It however, limits its merchandise to clothing, home accessories, house wares, clothing, shoes and accessories.

I observed shoppers for several minutes and then conducted a brief face-to-face interview using a set of three questions for male subjects and also for female subjects, if they were shopping alone. The questions for the men were:

1. Do you usually do your own clothing shopping?

2. Do you usually try on the clothes before you buy them?

3. If you could, would you have someone else do your shopping?

The questions for the women, if they were shopping alone were:

1. Are you shopping for someone else?

2. Do you usually do the clothes shopping for that person?

3. Do you know why that person has you do the shopping?

Many women perceive that men do not like to shop, and take it upon themselves to be in control of this task. The purpose of this study is to find out if men prefer to do their own clothes shopping, or if they would they rather delegate it. Also there is a perception that women prefer trying on clothes before making a purchase, as indicated by the larger number of dressing rooms available for women versus men in most stores. I want to know if men prefer not to try on clothing before they make a purchase, or if this is a false assumption.

I have previously worked in a retail clothing store that specialized in men’s and women’s clothing. With that experience, I am confident that I have the necessary people skills to interview people, and to make them feel at ease, in order to gather unbiased data. I also consider myself capable of making and recording my observations for the purposes of this field study. I have personally shopped in both of these stores, including the men’s department, so I am familiar with the layout of the store as well as with their merchandise. My personal experience includes accompanying the males in my family to shop for clothes, as well as shopping alone, and bringing clothes home for their approval. I am aware of men who like to shop, as well as those who don’t like shopping, so I have no bias toward either outcome. I am open-minded and curious about the analysis of the compiled data.

**Data Presentation & Analysis**

With the study of male shopping patterns being the goal, I chose to do my field work in the late evening hours when the majority of men would be off work and able to go to the store. I made observations at Wally-World on Thursday, July 22, 2010 from 9:15 until 10:00 pm and at Tracy’s on Friday, July 23, 2010 from 8:15 until 9:00 pm.

One disadvantage of comparing the two stores is the difference in the available goods for sale. Since Wally-World also sells groceries, I needed a way of a making a distinction in the intent of the people shopping there in order to be comparable to the people shopping at Tracy’s, who would only be looking at clothing. One major difference between the stores is the availability of shopping carts at Wally-World. I was able to make a judgment on the intent of the consumer, based upon the contents or lack of contents in the shopping cart, in association with the amount of time they spent in the clothing department. I classified the Wally-World subjects into two categories by observing their use of the shopping cart, or artifact.

A *browser* is a person who has other items in their cart, such as groceries, and spends only a minute or two in the clothing department. A browser also does not place any clothing in their cart for purchasing. Their intent is not to shop for clothing as indicated by their brief perusal. A *shopper* has either an empty cart, or only clothing items in their cart, and they spend a longer period of time in the department, which also allowed enough time to be interviewed. A Wally-World shopper’s intent is more comparable to the subject at Tracy’s, who I will also refer to as a shopper.

**Wally-World Data**

A total of 14 subjects were observed in the 45 minute time period. There were 2 males shopping alone, 1 male accompanied by 1 male, 4 males accompanied by 4 females, and 2 females shopping alone. I determined, based on my criteria, that 1 female and 1 male/female couple were browsers. These 3 people left the department before I was able to interview them, so I will not include them in the data analysis. The only other separate female, when interviewed, indicated that she did not usually do the shopping in the men’s department for the male. Thus, the data supplied by the interviews are from 7 men, who were either shopping alone, or accompanied by another person.

All 7 of the males interviewed said that they did their own shopping for clothing. Only 1 male said he rarely tried on clothing before buying, and the other 6 said that they never try on clothing before they buy it. It was common to hear them say things such as, “I know what size I am so that is what I grab.” When asked if they could, would they delegate the shopping to someone else, only 1 of the males said yes. The 6 others preferred to continue to do their own shopping.

The 7 males ranged in age from the early 20s to mid 50s. Everyone was American and spoke native English. Their physical descriptions varied from short and stocky to tall and lanky with no extremes noted. They were all dressed casually in t-shirts, shorts or jeans, with the exception of one male in his late 20s, who had just finished work. He was dressed in a white dress shirt and black slacks. The two males who accompanied each other, made a point of saying they were not “together” and explained to me that they were brothers, and one of them was just giving the other a ride since his car broke down. This was an interesting side note because I didn’t ask them if they were together.

Most of the shoppers were planning to purchase packaged clothing such as socks, underwear, and a dress shirt. Most of the shoppers said they were there to quickly find what they needed and go to pay for them. Only one couple spent more than five to ten minutes looking through the racks of clothing, and they had several pants and shirts added to their cart.

**Tracy’s Data**

A total of 15 subjects were observed in the 45 minute period. There were 4 males shopping alone, 1 male accompanied by 1 male, 4 males accompanied by 5 females, and no separate females. Everyone was considered a shopper based upon the length of time they spent looking at clothing, and this time allowed for each male to be interviewed. Thus, the data supplied by the interviews are from 10 men, who were either shopping alone, or accompanied by another person.

All 10 of the men said that they did their own clothes shopping. The only partial exception was made by one male, who interjected while I interviewed his life-partner. He said that he “picked out all of their clothing.” His partner replied, “I would rather pick out my own clothes.” This was an interesting side-note to see that a couple had some miscommunication about whose responsibility it was for shopping.

5 of the males said they don’t try on clothes before they buy them, and 5 of them do. 3 out of the 5 males that try on clothes said they only try on pants to check the length and fit, otherwise, they don’t try on anything else. Only 2 of the 10 males preferred to try on clothes as a general rule. An interesting side-note occurred with one couple. She found out he only tries on clothes when they are shopping together to appease her.

When asked if they would delegate their clothes shopping to someone else if they could, only 2 responded yes. One of the males was in his early 20s, and he was accompanied by his sister and her friend and said he “likes getting someone else’s opinion.” The other male was in his late 50s and he grinned as he said that he would do it because “he is lazy”.

The 10 males ranged in age from early 20s to late 50s. Everyone was American and spoke native English. All of them were well groomed and neatly dressed in casual to casual office attire. All of the males were within the average weight and height range, and there was a good representation of ethnicity. There weren’t any extremes in dress or behavior. All of the shoppers were looking at shirts, pants, shirts, or shoes. I did not observe anyone making purchases of packaged clothing. I observed a majority of them paying for clothing by the time they finished their shopping after I had interviewed them.

**Overall Comparison**

One of the main differences between the male shoppers was found at Tracy’s, where they spent more time shopping and purchased more items. Also, more shoppers said they preferred to try on clothing, but generally it was only pants they were concerned about. This difference can be explained by the analogy of fast food versus a sit down meal. The Tracy’s customer feels less rushed to get in and out based on my observations in both stores. In my opinion, the differences in the atmosphere of both stores did not affect the overall attitudes of male shoppers, just the amount of purchases.

The data was consistent for question one. 100% of the male shoppers said they did their own clothing shopping. Question two yielded a range between 50 and 85.7% for males who do not like to try on any type of clothing before purchasing it. The average is 64.7%. But, when pants are excluded from the data, only 17.6% of men would try on clothing. Question 3 had a range of 14.3% to 20% for males who would gladly delegate the task of clothing shopping to someone else. The average is 17.6%. So, most men will continue to do their own shopping even if it isn’t something they enjoy, because they want to make their own decisions.

**Cross-Cultural Comparison**

(to be completed after August 1)

**Conclusion**

More research needs to done by conducting additional field work to create a larger random sample. Given that this study was conducted in only two stores, within a single geographical location, for a limited amount of time, it still only provides enough data to propose a hypothesis. Other times of the day may show a higher percentage of women shopping for men, versus times that optimize men’s ability to shop for themselves. This particular study ruled out women shopping for men, but that may not be a generality. Certain days of the week may be more conducive for one gender over another to shop and studies done on different days may have completely different results.

My personal experiences with shopping for my sons and husband gave me the expectation that I would observe more women shopping for men. I was proven completely wrong with my assumption, and shown that men control their own shopping. My men typically buy shirts without trying them on, but usually they do try on the pants, so the findings supported my personal experiences. My husband often shops for himself, but he is quite happy to have me pick out things up for him, so I was surprised that so few men were willing to delegate their shopping. Very few men said they liked shopping, so that leaves me to conclude that men would rather do something they don’t like than leave a decision to someone else.